

UN GIRLS ADVOCACY FORUM

Elevator Pitch by Aparajita Banerjee

Ladies and Gentleman, and fellow audience members, today, as we are at the threshold of the 4th Industrial Revolution, an age of education, as well digital literacy pushed forward by the pandemic, we find that some gaps were bridges, but most problems faced by us today lead into ever widening space.

Technological innovation is transforming education, and updating the skills required for modern work. Building future-ready (and pandemic-proof) education systems requires curricula fit for the 21st century, to build a solid foundation for a lifetime of adapting and developing new abilities.

Despite the progress made on closing gender gaps in work and education, gender inequality remains the norm around the world. Violence against women and girls has yet to be properly addressed in any country, and social, cultural, political, and economic barriers continue to hinder women's participation in labour forces, politics, and humanitarian action - while stunting their presence in leadership roles, and today this has led us to inequality even in the time of technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality. We forget the importance this has in our day to day activities, which is why we are in this state in the first place. I want to impress upon you, Change, in the form of equality, can no longer wait.

Technology has provided a crucial lifeline during COVID-19 by linking people to loved ones and work - in ways that make it clearer just how digitised the near future will be. The hybrid forms of collaboration that have emerged as we move towards a new normal bring their own challenges and may aggravate existing inequalities. To thrive in a contemporary workplace, young people need to develop digital fluency and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills from an early age. But when I speak of digital skills, digital skills are essential, but real digital fluency means applying ethical considerations to technical achievement.

I come from a developing South Asian country, India, with a population set to overtake China this year. We have long been a country of culture, history, tradition and pride. However, after independence, the gender gaps I spoke about have not closed despite consistent efforts. I come from a progressive family where independent thought and action is encouraged, but this is not synonymous for the majority of women and girls in my country. To bring your attention, on the "Why" of my efforts here today- I would like to speak personally - about my time as a first year participant in FIRST Tech Challenge- an international robotics competition. As the Head Programmer for an all-girls team - the only all girls team there was, and we were a formidable force, bagging awards thereafter.

We were all first-year participants, we were all 13 year olds competing with people nearly 3-4 years older than us. People underestimated us, there were 2-3 teams that mocked us because of our age, our work and gender. This at 13 years of age, hit us hard because we were as proficient as them if not more, we were beating them in the competitions and so forth. In spite of us winning award after award. These incidents brought forth the whole issue of gender inequality, which my parents and school had educated me about- but we didn't ever see it coming to us in the 21st century in an environment that hallmarks progress.

It is in the light of this that I urge member states to:

- Prioritize digital education and literacy for girls.

- Promote gender-responsive digital teaching and learning by investing in teacher training on gender-responsive digital pedagogy and removing gender bias from the digital curriculum.
- Work with communities with low digital literacy to emphasize the benefits of technology on girls' lives.
- Curate affordable girl-specific digital education and technology for girls by increasing government funding for digital literacy classes and school-issued technology to support girls' access and education in STEM.

But that is not the point of my story, the point is that in the course of the competition, apart from the competitive side of technical things, community outreach was a big part of our overall commitments. You see, with fast, ever-changing dynamics, mindsets are shifty, but not quite. The realisation dawned on me in the course of my time as a Youth Advocate last year, that the problem lies not in the efforts put in but when they are put in. We speak of women empowerment and equality and everything under that umbrella, at a stage when it is already too late and mindset and thinking have already formed in the minds of the 20-say 85 year olds.

The time to bring these issues to light as women, for women and to society in general- the key lies in striking early, to implore the adolescents of today, to implore our so-called "Gen Z" and Gen Alpha". I remind you that I am 16, and It is eventually my generation who will take over from you in the course of the next 20 years.

I would like to reiterate a few points from our final statement-

In order to create safe digital platforms and learning communities and promote girls' voices digitally, we urge Member States to:

- Increase access to social media for girls suppressed by powerful institutions to protect their advocacy and representation.
- Create safe digital learning communities through increased enforcement of community guidelines, addressing gaps in safety policies, and increasing accountability through clear processes of reporting digital harassment.

All girls should have access to digital education and literacy. Due to a bias in education, girls struggle to receive and understand technology. Today, technology is an essential source of information, necessitating the improvement of digital literacy. Despite girls' high interest to pursue technological careers, they are limited due to gender bias, insufficient access to technology, and a lack of inclusive educators.

I ask you to pay attention to the recommendation and the language inculcated the Final Girls Statement and recommendations made in the same.

A very good morning Ladies & Gentleman, members of the UN and fellow audience members. We have gathered here today to put truth in the words “If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.”

We are here to bridge the gaps caused due to the gender-economic-digital divide, to create safe digital learning communities through increased enforcement of community guidelines, addressing gaps in safety policies, and increasing accountability through clear processes of reporting digital harassment.

Tragic events have served to focus greater attention on the structural inequalities and injustices that undermine our collective security and economic well-being.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted disparities in women and girls education systems, the mistreatment of minorities and indigenous peoples has generated a relentless series of distressing headlines. Whether based on race, caste, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or immigration status, discrimination remains rampant.

Fully realizing the promise of the United Nations more than 75 years after its founding will require a fundamental shift to a more forward-looking social vision, which takes historical injustice into account while tapping the broadest possible talent pool for solutions. Which is exactly why we are here today.

I implore each and every one of you here, to remember that the intermixing of cultures and peoples over the centuries has expanded economies, buttressed international relations, facilitated commerce, and directly contributed to improving the quality of life.

Festering injustice as a legacy of a poorly-understood past can act as a brake on development - and a failure to confront it can allow it to linger for generations, nurturing resentment and sowing conflict.

Ensuring that everyone has access to a quality education will disrupt the exclusionary patterns we see today. It can help mend fragmented societies, prevent fracturing along identity fault-lines, and boost a more diverse mix of entrepreneurs. A wider range of role models will become available to inspire more diverse communities, and more energy will be harnessed to find the solutions needed for contemporary problems - whether it is a global health crisis, or a geopolitical conflagration or the theme of the digital divide we are discussing today.

Which would be to provide space for girls to interact with governments , share their ideas and offer proposed language for the CSW 66 outcome document.

Allow girls and member states an opportunity to better understand one another's perspectives with respect to girls leadership, participation and inclusion in decision making process

Under revamped paradigms, success will accrue on the basis of ability, not identity.